

STAT

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 8THE NEW REPUBLIC
18 July 1981

The resistance fighters think they get no help from the US. They're wrong.

Arms for Afghanistan

A year and a half after Soviet troops marched into Afghanistan, the US Central Intelligence Agency is coordinating a complex, far-flung program, involving five countries and more than \$100 million, to provide the Afghan resistance with the weaponry of modern guerrilla warfare. The result is an emerging anti-Soviet alliance—the United States, China, Pakistan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia—that, in the judgment of American planners, is effectively countering the most blatant Soviet aggression of the postwar era.

Shortly after the December 1980 invasion there were scattered newspaper reports that the United States intended to supply arms to the Afghan resistance fighters. Not much more has been heard on the subject since. In fact, the American role in Afghanistan—as described by senior officials of the Carter and Reagan administrations—is far more extensive than any of those initial reports suggested. For the United States the stakes are especially high. This is the first time that weapons supplied with American help have been used to kill regular troops of the Soviet army—though thousands of American soldiers were killed by Soviet-supplied weapons in Korea and Vietnam.

For the Afghan people, the Soviet invasion and its aftermath have been devastating. In a country of 16 million people, tens of thousands have been killed and wounded. Soviet helicopter gunships have emptied most villages, forcing more than two million men, women, and children to flee into neighboring Pakistan, where they make up the largest refugee population in the world today.

In discussing the clandestine operation to supply arms to the resistance, officials of the Reagan and Carter administrations tell a remarkably consistent story—balancing their desire to report on its success with their desire to keep operational details secret. These officials—from the White House, the State Department, the CIA, and the Pentagon—are convinced that the Soviets are bogged down in Afghanistan, a view supported by British and Arab intelligence estimates. The Russians have lost their grip on the roads linking Afghanistan's principal cities. They have suffered an estimated 6,000 casualties, with 2,000 killed. Several thousand more Russian troops are ill with hepatitis. Resistance forces are now initiating the fighting, combining the tactics of guerrilla warfare with increasingly sophisticated weaponry. According to a secret White House report, at least 60 Russian helicopters have been shot down—many by surface-to-air missiles. The Soviets have failed to develop either a political or a military strategy to deal